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AUTHOR Johns, Jerry L.; VanLeirsburg, Peggy
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ABSTRACT

A study compared results of a 1990 survey of educators to determine growth in knowledge and use of portfolio assessment. The study aimed to report the reactions and feelings of educators who use or may plan portfolios. A total of 173 educators from Illinois enrolled in a literacy workshop sponsored by a midwestern reading association answered a questionnaire that asked them to rank on a 5-point scale their familiarity with portfolios in 4 areas: knowledge, content, theoretical bases, and practical problems related to using portfolios. Results indicated that: (1) familiarity with the concept of portfolio assessment has grown; (2) respondents in both surveys, 1990 and 1991, agreed with S. Valencia's four guiding principles of assessment: authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative; (3) educators preferred that students include in their portfolios written tasks such as a list of materials read, writing samples related to the literacy experiences, and student self-evaluations; and (4) planning, managing and organizing were the major practical concerns. (Two tables of data are included.) (PRA)

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HOW PROFESSIONALS VIEW PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Jerry L. Johns
Northern Illinois University

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Curriculum and Instruction
Reading Clinic—119 Graham
DeKalb, Illinois 60115

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815-753-1416

How Professionals View Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios offer an innovative framework for assessment. However, they are more novel to literacy than to other fields of study. Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) describe the origins of portfolios as applied to collections of work by commercial artists, models, photographers, artists, and people in other fields of endeavor to showcase their achievements. "The portfolio is tangible evidence of accomplishments and skills that must be updated as a person changes and grows" (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991, p. 43). It is from this collection of works that each person is evaluated in a variety of contexts.

The concept of the literacy portfolio as a framework for assessment is quite different from traditional, standardized methods. Achievement tests offer quantified units that can be counted and accounted (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). The literacy portfolio, however, offers a broader view of student progress that is complex and includes collaborative, authentic, multidimensional evaluative tasks that measure growth over time. The portfolio is a vehicle that helps students to become independent learners and encourages teachers to facilitate such individual processes.

Literacy professionals are looking beyond norm-referenced, standardized tests for ways of sampling the language arts performance of students that are more closely linked to instruction (Jongsma, 1989). Portfolios offer one such means of performance-based assessment anchored in authenticity. The integrity and validity to be gained by their use may outweigh inherent practical issues such as regular discussions with students and basic management considerations (Wolf, 1989).

Johns and VanLeirsburg (1990) surveyed a group of 128 professional educators to determine the extent of their knowledge and use of the literacy portfolio as an assessment tool. Most of the subjects surveyed agreed with four basic principles of literacy assessment: authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative (Valencia, 1990). The subjects, however, rated

themselves as having little general familiarity with the concept of portfolio assessment. They further indicated concerns with practical problems in the use of portfolios such as planning, organization, and management. The contents for inclusion in literacy portfolios were also at issue.

Purpose

This study was an extension of a study by Johns and VanLeirsburg (1990). The purpose of the present study was to compare results with the 1990 survey of educators to determine growth in knowledge and use of portfolio assessment. There is much written about the theoretical bases, possible contents, and practical problems of portfolios, but little research has been reported on the reactions and feelings of educators who use or may plan to use portfolios.

Rationale for Portfolios

There are theoretical and pragmatic reasons for a portfolio approach to literacy assessment. Valencia (1990) offered four such guiding principles drawn from both research and instructional practices.

1. Sound assessment is anchored in authenticity—of tasks, texts, and contexts.
2. Assessment must be a continuous, on-going process that chronicles development.
3. Because reading is a complex and multifaceted process, valid reading assessment must be multidimensional and committed to sampling a wide range of cognitive processes, affective responses, and literacy activities.
4. Assessment must provide for active, collaborative reflection by both teacher and student.

The portfolio offers a natural means of assessing reading and writing within the ongoing instructional program over a period of time.

Method

Subjects

A total of 173 subjects enrolled in a literacy workshop sponsored by a midwestern reading association participated in this study: 130 had not used portfolios and 43 had previous experience with portfolio use. Workshop participants came from many different school systems in northern Illinois. No information about portfolios was shared prior to the administration of the questionnaire.

Of the group of 43 professionals who had used portfolios, 47% were primary teachers, 21% were intermediate teachers, 7% were secondary teachers (7-12), 16% were reading teachers in a special reading or Chapter 1 capacity, and the remaining 9% of the teachers taught in other capacities including ESL and continuing education programs. Slightly more than 10% of this group had from 2 to 5 years teaching experience, more than one-third had 6 to 10 years experience, and over half had 11 or more years of teaching experience. Approximately 70% of those using portfolios had earned a master's degree or additional hours, 24% had earned a bachelor's degree, and 5% were K-12 reading specialists. About one-third of this group had taken from 4 to 12 hours of coursework in reading, 42% had taken from 13 to 21 such hours, and nearly 30% had taken 22 or more hours of reading courses. Overall, this group represented experienced teachers with more than four reading courses.

The 130 professionals who had not used portfolios included 38% primary teachers, 18% intermediate teachers, 15% secondary teachers, 14% reading teachers, and 15% teaching in other capacities. Nearly 5% of this group had less than 1 year of teaching experience, 17% had 2 to 5 years experience, 18% had 6 to 10 years experience, and more than 60% had 11 or more years of teaching experience. About 35% of the subjects who had not used portfolios had earned a bachelor's degree, nearly 60% had earned a master's degree or higher, and 8% had earned a K-12

reading specialist certificate. Of the non-portfolio group, about 50% had 12 or less hours of reading coursework, 24% had taken from 13 to 21 hours of reading courses, and nearly 24% had taken 22 or more hours in reading. Overall, this group was composed of experienced teachers who had taken fewer reading courses than the group currently using portfolios.

Survey

The original survey of 34 items was modified slightly for the 1991 study. The possible contents section excluded videotapes of classroom reading activities and included standardized tests, informal reading inventories, and writing samples of different genres in which ideas are modified from first draft to final product. Further, the practical problems section of the survey was modified to include costs associated with folders, boxes, files, tapes, etc.

The revised survey contained 42 items and was administered in June, 1991 to 173 educators attending a literacy workshop. The findings, reported separately for "portfolio" and "non-portfolio" users, are presented in four areas: knowledge, content, theoretical bases, and practical problems related to using portfolios. In addition, space was provided for current users of portfolios to list the items they included in portfolios. In the final section of this study, some relevant and important comparisons to the results of the 1990 survey are included.

Findings

Knowledge of Portfolios

Subjects were asked to rank their familiarity with portfolios on a five-point scale ranging from "extremely," to "quite a bit," "some," "very little," and "I'm not." Nearly half of the non-portfolio group rated themselves as having "very little" or no knowledge of portfolios while only 10% of the group using portfolios responded in the same manner. About one-third of both groups rated themselves as having "some" knowledge of portfolios. Approximately 14% of the

non-portfolio group felt they were "extremely" or "quite a bit" familiar with portfolios, while nearly 60% of those already using portfolios shared those same ratings.

About one-fourth of the total group reported that they were involved in actually using portfolios. The decision to use them was reported by about 60% of the group to be theirs alone; over 40% reported that portfolio use was required by someone else (e.g., their school or a school district). Over 40% of those using portfolios did so only in their classrooms, 25% within their school or district, and about 35% reported portfolio use within their classroom, school, and district. Most portfolios, nearly 75%, were teacher made. However, 5% were commercial portfolios and 21% used a combination of teacher-made and commercial portfolios.

Contents

The 173 subjects were asked to rate a list of contents for possible inclusion in a portfolio. Items listed for possible inclusion in a literacy portfolio along with survey results are shown in Table 1. Total percentages for each item vary between 99 and 101 due to rounding.

More than 80% of the group that had used portfolios chose a listing of materials read, writing samples related to literacy experiences, student self-evaluations, a thoughtful selection of student work on important reading skills or strategies, and writing samples of different genres in which ideas are modified from first draft to final product as most important for inclusion in a student portfolio. At least 80% of the group which had not used portfolios before chose the same contents for inclusion with the addition of teacher observations and insights. Between 28% and 42% of both groups felt photographs of reading activities or standardized tests should be included in a literacy portfolio; however, they were the least chosen options in this survey.

Table 1

Opinions of Professionals: Inclusion of Selected Items in a Portfolio

Portfolio Items	Percent of Responses					
	DI	PI	U	PW	DW	O
audio tapes						
portfolio (N=130)	19	26	16	28	12	0
non-portfolio (N=43)	23	31	24	17	5	0
photographs of reading activities						
portfolio	16	12	28	40	5	0
non-portfolio	8	28	32	25	6	1
a listing of materials read						
portfolio	53	35	2	9	0	0
non-portfolios	52	36	12	1	0	0
writing samples related to literacy experiences						
portfolio	88	9	0	2	0	0
non-portfolios	55	29	13	2	0	1
a checklist of relevant reading behaviors						
portfolio	44	35	12	9	0	0
non-portfolio	35	34	23	5	2	1
student self-evaluation						
portfolio	35	47	12	5	2	0
non-portfolio	35	41	22	2	0	0
a thoughtful selection of student work on important reading skills or strategies						
portfolio	49	35	9	7	0	0
non-portfolio	45	39	13	3	0	0
teacher observations and insights						
portfolio	58	19	14	9	0	0
non-portfolio	41	40	18	2	0	0
collaboratively produced progress notes						
portfolio	40	26	26	7	2	0
non-portfolio	25	43	27	5	0	0
classroom tests						
portfolio	28	30	17	19	7	0
non-portfolio	32	31	22	10	5	0

Portfolio Items	Percent of Responses					
	DI	PI	U	PW	DW	O
standardized tests						
portfolio	14	21	21	33	9	2
non-portfolio	24	18	25	23	10	1
informal reading inventories						
portfolio	30	40	14	14	2	0
non-portfolio	29	36	24	10	1	0
writing samples of different genres in which ideas are modified from first draft to final product						
portfolio	67	26	2	5	0	0
non-portfolio	45	38	12	5	0	0

DI = I'd definitely include
PI = I'd probably include
U = I'm uncertain
PW = I probably wouldn't include
DW = I definitely wouldn't include
O = Omitted response

The 43 educators using portfolios were asked to list the items they actually included in their portfolios. The major items, in descending frequency, included writing samples, reading logs, teacher observations, informal reading inventories, and work samples. Other items mentioned by a few of the educators included standardized test scores, classroom tests, journals, audio tapes, and the student's evaluation of his or her own progress.

Theoretical Bases

The educators were asked to respond to Valencia's (1990) four statements of rationale for portfolios which are characterized by the following key words: authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative. The five-point scale offered these choices: "strongly agree," "agree," "uncertain," "disagree," or "strongly disagree". About 70% of both groups, those who had used portfolios and those who had not, agreed that authenticity should anchor reading assessment. However, the strongest agreement was in response to assessment being a continuous, on-going process; more than 96% of both groups agreed or strongly agreed with this concept.

About 90% of both groups also agreed that assessment should be multidimensional to reflect the complexity of the reading task. More than 84% of both groups agreed that assessment should provide for active, collaborative reflection by both teacher and student. Fewer than 5% of the respondents disagreed with any of the four underlying principles of portfolio assessment.

Practical Problems

The fourth major area surveyed related to possible practical problems with the use of portfolios for assessment. Educators were asked to rate a list of possible practical problems on a five-point scale ranging from "a very serious concern" to "no concern." The responses of both groups are shown in Table 2.

The greatest concerns by those already using portfolios included planning, managing contents, talking with students about contents, and preparing notes and completing checklists. At least 40% of this group responded to these issues and expressed either serious or very serious concerns. At least 50% of the group that had not used portfolios had serious or very serious concerns relative to planning, organizing, managing contents, preparing notes and completing checklists, and using portfolios as the sole means of evaluating student progress. Both groups felt that managing portfolios would be the biggest practical concern.

Of lesser concern to the group who had used portfolios were: using portfolios in parent-teacher conferences, using portfolios as one means of evaluating student progress, and costs associated with folders, files, and tapes. No more than 22% of the group were seriously or very seriously concerned with these concerns. The issues of least concern to the group that had not used portfolios were where to keep portfolios, providing access to students, and using portfolios as one means of evaluating student progress. Not more than 26% of this group responded with serious or very serious concerns to these concerns. It is noteworthy that 25 to 43% of the group which had not used portfolios indicated some concern for each of the possible problems.

Table 2

Possible Practical Problems With Portfolios

Possible Practical Problems	Percent of Responses					
	VS	SC	S	VL	NC	O
planning portfolios						
portfolio	14	30	37	12	7	0
non-portfolio	19	37	35	8	1	0
organizing portfolios						
portfolio	14	23	37	21	5	0
non-portfolio	18	37	38	10	1	0
managing the contents of a portfolio						
portfolio	26	23	37	9	5	0
non-portfolio	28	37	26	7	2	1
developing checklists for the portfolio						
portfolio	12	30	47	7	5	0
non-portfolio	14	32	35	16	3	0
where to keep portfolios						
portfolio	14	16	28	28	14	0
non-portfolio	5	13	29	40	12	0
providing access to students						
portfolio	9	23	37	21	9	0
non-portfolio	7	18	43	25	7	0
talking with students about contents						
portfolio	21	19	26	23	12	0
non-portfolio	18	22	29	23	7	0
preparing notes/completing checklists						
portfolio	14	33	40	7	7	0
non-portfolio	22	22	38	7	2	0
all teachers in my school using a portfolio						
portfolio	16	26	30	16	9	2
non-portfolio	18	18	31	25	7	0
all my school system embracing the use of portfolios						
portfolio	19	10	42	16	12	2
non-portfolio	17	16	33	25	8	0

Possible Practical Problems	Percent of Responses					
	VS	SC	S	VL	NC	O
using portfolios in parent-teacher conferences						
portfolio	5	17	28	26	23	0
non-portfolio	6	22	33	28	10	0
using portfolios as the sole means of evaluating student progress						
portfolio	19	14	42	14	12	0
non-portfolio	31	31	25	12	2	0
using portfolios as one means of evaluating student progress						
portfolio	7	14	9	28	42	0
non-portfolio	8	18	27	31	15	1
having portfolios replace standardized tests or achievement tests						
portfolio	14	19	40	14	14	0
non-portfolio	25	18	37	15	5	0
costs associated with folders, boxes, files, tapes, etc.						
portfolio	7	14	30	38	9	2
non-portfolio	11	21	29	27	12	0

VS = Very serious concern
SC = Serious concern
S = Some concern
VL = Very little concern
NC = No concern
O = Omitted response

Discussion and Conclusions

Based on our survey, there appears to be growing familiarity among professionals with the concept of portfolio assessment. In our present 1991 sample of 173 elementary, secondary, reading, and other educators, about one-fourth were using portfolios as a tool of reading and writing assessment. More than half of those who had used portfolios rated themselves as "extremely" or "quite a bit" familiar with the portfolio concept and only 10% felt they had "very little" to no knowledge. About three-fourths of our sample were not using portfolios. Of this group, about 14% felt they were "extremely" or "quite a bit" familiar with the portfolio concept.

Nearly 40% felt they were somewhat familiar with portfolios, and around half of this group rated their familiarity with portfolios as "very little" to none. In the 1990 survey, however, more than 70% of the subjects rated their knowledge "very little" or "I'm not;" only 8% felt they had "quite a bit" of knowledge about portfolios. It appears that more educators are familiar with the concept of portfolios than were just one year ago.

The respondents to both surveys, 1990 and 1991 (portfolio and non-portfolio), agreed overwhelmingly with Valencia's (1990) four guiding principles of assessment: authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative. The greatest agreement (90%) among the 1990 respondents was that assessment should be a continuous and on-going process; 98% of the 1991 portfolio group and 96% of the 1991 non-portfolio group also agreed with that concept of assessment. The principle least chosen by the 1990 subjects was that sound assessment is based on authenticity. However, 60% did agree with that concept. From the 1991 group that used portfolios, 70% agreed that assessment should be authentic; 69% of the 1991 group that did not use portfolios also agreed. Fewer than 2% of the 1990 subjects and 5% of the 1991 groups disagreed with any of the four guiding principles for portfolio assessment.

The contents of a literacy portfolio are less at issue than was apparent in our 1990 survey results. An average of approximately 20% of these respondents would not include audio tapes, video tapes, or photographs. We inferred that most educators would find these costly and time-consuming. In the 1991 survey, however, both the portfolio and non-portfolio groups ranked photographs of reading activities a low choice for inclusion. Approximately half of each group would include audio tapes although 40% of the portfolio group probably or definitely wouldn't include this item. The second lowest choice of the 1991 groups was standardized tests; a choice which did not exist in the 1990 survey. Written tasks, such as writing samples, a list of materials read, and student self-evaluations, ranked high for inclusion with respondents completing the 1990

as well as the 1991 survey. With the exception of photographs, standardized tests, and audio tapes, more than half of the 1991 groups chose all other survey items for possible inclusion in a literacy portfolio.

The respondents who had used portfolios were requested to list those items they actually included in their portfolios. The item mentioned most often by this group was writing samples, which was one of the most chosen items for inclusion by both surveyed groups. The second item listed by portfolio users was a student reading log or list of books read by each student. This item was not included in the survey. However, the third most often included item by users of portfolios was teacher observations. This item was included in the survey, and about 80% of both groups also chose teacher observations for inclusion.

Practical problems related to the systematic collection of reading and writing artifacts continue to be real issues for the educators we surveyed. Planning, managing, and organizing portfolios, as well as preparing notes and completing checklists are the major practical concerns of those responding to the 1991 survey. Both groups agreed that these were serious or very serious concerns. However, it is of interest that the percentage of concern is slightly higher in all areas for the group that did not use portfolios. For example, 44% of the group who had used portfolios responded that they were concerned about planning portfolios while 56% of the non-portfolio group reported "serious" or "very serious" concern for that issue.

In our 1990 survey, the same practical issues were examined, but 11% of those surveyed omitted these questions. Less than 3% of either group in the 1991 survey omitted any item related to the practical issues of portfolio use. As familiarity and use of literacy portfolios increases, the practical concerns appear to decline. Nevertheless, initiating and monitoring portfolios continues to present genuine challenges (Johns, 1991). While these areas continue to be at issue, some of these problems appear to be have relatively simple solutions. Perhaps as educators become better

acquainted with portfolios, and modify their views, they will view portfolios not as messy objects, but as vehicles that represent what students are actively doing (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

In summary, familiarity with portfolios has grown from our 1990 survey of educators as compared with the 1991 group. Educators from both 1990 and 1991 overwhelmingly agree with Valencia's four guiding principles of assessment: authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and collaborative. The portfolio and non-portfolio groups of the 1991 survey, as well as the 1990 sample, chose a list of materials read and writing samples related to literacy experiences most often for inclusion in the portfolio. There is a decline in percentage of concern toward practical problems with portfolio usage. However, planning, managing, and organizing continue to rank as the most serious concerns in both the 1990 and 1991 surveys.

Used as an assessment framework, portfolios are systematic collections by students and teachers that serve as the basis to examine "effort, improvement, processes, and achievement as well as to meet the accountability demands usually achieved by more formal testing procedures" (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991, p. 41). It is apparent that educators at all levels in our survey have become more aware of the literacy portfolio as an assessment tool. The issues of practicality continue to present challenges to the effective and widespread use of portfolios.

Knowledge of literacy portfolios is becoming more widespread. Educators agree with the theoretical bases for portfolio assessment. Although the practical problems of initiating and monitoring portfolios continue be of concern, their challenges are beginning to be met and answered. Portfolios have gained acceptance as an assessment form applied to student reading and writing. Perhaps with even greater knowledge and more widespread use, the literacy portfolio will replace standardized tests as classrooms reflect assessment grounded in instruction.

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